



MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

CAC MEETING MINUTES

January 31, 2023

In Attendance:

Members: Tim Aldrich, Lea Bossler, Louie Bouma, Peggy Cordell, Kit Fischer, Matt Fregerio, Everett Headley, Kylie Paul, Greg Price, Ron Skinner, Pat Sweeney, Susan Thraen

R2 Staff: Randy Arnold, Vivaca Crowser, Liz Bradley, Ryan Klimstra, Mike Ebinger, Nick DeCesare, Pat Saffel, Loren Flynn, Morgan Dollinger, Kyle Miller, Dori Schiele, Sydney Young & Alyssa Janicsek

Other FWP staff & guests: Commissioner Jeff Burrows, Parks and Recreation Board member Jody Loomis, Stephanie Brown (FWP landowner relations), Sam Hoggatt (FWP shooting range development)

Welcome, overview & introductions

Vivaca Crowser welcomed all in attendance and Zoom worked well for those joining online. Randy introduced Commissioner Jeff Burrows who will go through confirmation soon and will be at the next Commission meeting in February. Randy also followed up on some questions that CAC members had asked about grizzly bears, livestock loss and current legislation.

Shooting Range Program

- Stephanie Brown and Sam Hoggatt were introduced. Stephanie is the new Access & Landowner Relations Bureau Chief and Sam is the director of the shooting range development program.
- The program has several goals, including providing access for recreational shooting sports, resolving issues of informal shooting ranges on public lands [i.e., lead mitigation, conflict resolution], educational opportunities, and building a flagship range somewhere in the State.
- The ultimate goal is to have one range in each region, within ~one hour of the major population center.
- The program is in its beginning stages, so they are looking for feedback, questions, concerns, potential sites for ranges, etc.
- Stephanie will be sending out a survey to CAC members in the new few weeks so that members can provide early input into this new program.

Everett Headley (CAC Chair): Private Lands/Public Wildlife Update

- Everett also serves on the PLPW and provided a quick update of the goals PLPW has during this legislative session, including increasing the reimbursement cap for landowners who participate in Block Management.
- He welcomed CAC members to reach out to him with ideas or questions.

Nick DeCesare: 10-yr Moose Study

- Main goals of the study were identifying contributing factors in population dynamics and solidifying monitoring strategies.
- The study focused on three ecosystems: the Cabinet Mountains, the Rocky Mountain Front, and the Big Hole Valley.
- In general, over the 10-year study all three ecosystems experienced stable populations, with variation in female survival and calf survival.
- The study found that the biggest contributing factor to moose mortality in these ecosystems are health related- namely nutrition, parasite overload and arterial worms. About 32% of hunter harvested moose are infected with arterial worms, which transmit from mule deer to moose via horse flies. Arterial worms can infect other species but are not a risk to humans.
- Moose in the Rocky Mountain Front ecosystem are more fecund and are more likely to have twins, while the Cabinet Mountain ecosystem experiences higher predation rates especially to calves (similar to Alaska and Yukon ecosystems). Calf survival is lowest in the first 30-60 days of life, when they are more vulnerable to predation.
- FWP uses data from hunter sightings of moose, similar to the way the department surveys wolf sightings.
- The study will also use weather site data to look at potential climate change impacts to moose survival.

Liz Bradley: Wildlife Program updates

- CWD Sampling continued across the state this year and in Region 2.
 - There still have not been any positive detections of CWD in R2, and their continues to be a large push to educate and prevent carcass dumping, which can spread CWD. Signage has been posted by biologists in common dumping areas and for the past two seasons and we've installed carcass disposal sites in the Bitterroot, Mineral County and up the Blackfoot.
 - We are encouraging hunters to get their harvests (deer, elk, moose) sampled for CWD even if there aren't any positive cases nearby. Sampling occurs Sept./October-December at the regional office and hunters can drop off or send in their own samples.
 - There have been a lot of inquiries about the results of the 3-week mule deer season; we don't have all the harvest numbers in yet so it's hard to say how successful it was. There is a focus statewide, called the Mule Deer Initiative, to focus on population dynamics, management practices and public outreach.

Final Comments

- Greg Price brought up crowding/extra hunter pressure and change of elk behavior in some areas of the state and asked what others are seeing in that regard.
 - This brought up several topics, like a non-resident license cap, the choose-your-weapon or choose-your-season debate, and whether there's too much pressure on wildlife populations which could potentially lead to the need to limit opportunity for hunters.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00pm. Next quarterly meeting is May 11, 2023. August meeting may have an alternate location (Field Trip).